Aden

175
[312] That Aden still possessed some fine buildings even as late as 1710 we know from the record left by a French traveller who, after referring to the "handsome" aqueduct which had been built originally in 1500 to bring water into the town from Sheikh Othman ten miles away, and deploring the state of the fortifications, referred to the town in the following terms:

[342] "The city is still considerably large and one may still see
[349] several handsome houses two storeys high with flat roofs, but
[368] there is also an abundance of rubbish and ruins. It must be
[532] owned that there is nothing finer of its kind than the baths there. They are lined with marble or jasper and covered with a handsome dome, having a hole at the top to let in light, and adorned on the inside with galleries supported by magnificent pillars."[1]

178 There was no sign of this delightful place when I arrived,
368 nor were there any public baths, swimming or otherwise, until
346 twenty-four years later when I opened the handsome Municipal Swimming Bath in Holkat Bay, but by 1931 Aden was by no means in an "exigent condition of poverty and neglect". Far from it; it was a flourishing town, though all that remained of the ancient splendour was the tall white minaret in Crater overlooking what is now the Football Stadium. A lonely ghost from the past whose mosque has long since disappeared.

000 My disagreeable first impression remains with many travellers for the rest of their lives and the mere mention of the name Aden is sufficient to conjure up in their imaginations an exaggerated recollection of heat, haze and noise and, above all, a barrenness beyond belief.

312 In the early nineteen-thirties fresh water from wells in the village of Sheikh Othman had only recently been brought in to the main town and the population were still dependent mainly on condensed water for drinking purposes, and there was virtually no water at all for gardens or any other form of
000 cultivation. Only a few like myself succeeded in penetrating the haze and forgetting the lack of vegetation and the discomfort of prickly heat, as we became more and more absorbed with the people and their problems and travelled beyond the

[1] Dr. J. C. Young, *Ancient History of Aden*, 1923.

8:Gt. Brit., Colonial Office G-3 (1951-52)1954 MM1 Aden MM1

membership, at present regrettably small, is increasing, and it is to be hoped that when the books are housed in the new library building which is to be situated in the centre of Crater, its greater accessibility will encourage more Arabs to join.

There is no tradition of pictorial art in South-West Arabia and practically no native handicrafts, therefore it is unusually difficult for the local Arab to produce anything original or characteristic, and his attempts at self-expression are all influenced by foreign art and have none of the freshness of primitive or aboriginal painting. He is indeed a late-comer to all the finer arts and consequently lacks taste and spontaneity. Nevertheless, the urge for self-expression is there, and the Aden Arts Club came into being specifically with the idea of encouraging people of all races interested in painting to meet together. In this it has been only partially successful as once again the European element tends to submerge the Arab.

In the last three years the Arts Club has sponsored three exhibitions of painting (two of which included handicrafts) and these exhibitions have certainly caused a quickening of interest even if they have produced no more tangible result. Though the show of talent is unimpressive, it is too early to demand standards and the aim is to arouse interest and stimulate endeavour. The same purpose is being pursued amongst the women, and here the standard of handicrafts, as produced by the Aden Protectorate Levies Wives' Club, has shown marked improvement—possibly because they are quick to grasp that good work can command a good market. Such incentive is excellent, and it is a pity that it is inapplicable to the less functional arts.